



CONCEPT NOTE

**Seminar to build capacity on
“Mainstreaming climate change concerns into
agricultural policies in Central Africa”**

October 2015

Background and justification

Africa is considered as one of the most vulnerable continents to climate changes. Such changes constitute an obstacle to efforts so far deployed to achieve development. Their real and anticipated negative impacts are especially perceptible in the agricultural sector since climate significantly influences harvest, output, the agricultural calendar and other agriculture-related activities. Already, many farmers are witnessing the effects of climate change, such as irregular and unpredictable rainfall, the resurgence of storms and prolonged droughts. The change in meteorological conditions also favours the emergence of pests and diseases that attack crops. Most studies conducted in Africa in general indicate a drop in the production of subsistence foodstuff such as sorghum, maize, millet and groundnuts due to global warming.

In Central Africa most especially, a sub-region with a mix of coastal, sahelian and forested areas that are very exposed to the vagaries of the weather, agriculture remains one of the most important sectors of the economy with more than half of the population involved in it. On average, it accounts for at least 30 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product of countries. However, agriculture is essentially the subsistence type and with heavy dependence on rain to irrigate the crops. It is therefore very vulnerable to climate changes, to seasonal variations and rainfall distribution.

In light of the foregoing effects, it is important to ensure that climate change concerns are sufficiently mainstreamed into agricultural policies at national and sub-regional levels. Current practice consists in responding to disasters and engaging rehabilitation actions more or less limited in time. Yet, scientific and technical advances in recent decades have produced tools and methods that today permit better prevention and preparation for the vagaries of the weather. Policies, strategies and programmes must increasingly take on board climate knowledge and information to achieve sustainable development against the backdrop of climate change. For instance, surveys conducted among farmers show that agricultural calendars established since many decades with past climate data, are in general no longer valid today because of current climate changes. Agricultural output and production that were based on such ancient calendars are increasingly variable thus contributing partially to exacerbation of malnutrition and famine. Agricultural policies, programs and calendars that incorporate climate change concerns are necessary to better cope with the challenges of adaptation of agricultural practices, management of natural disasters, water resources and epidemics.

In its fourth evaluation report published in 2007, the WMO/UNEP Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) envisages various strategies for early adaptation to climate change, including the use of new varieties, more efficient use of water resources, a modification of agricultural calendars or of areas for agricultural activities, more efficient use of methods for controlling pests, diseases and weed and better use of seasonal weather forecasts to minimize production-related risks. Were such adaptation measures to be widely adopted, they could broadly contribute to neutralize the negative effects of climate changes and take advantage of their positive effects.

In making and implementing agricultural policies, it is important to recall that while agriculture is hit by the impacts of climate change, it is itself responsible for 14 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions. Under these conditions, mitigation of climate change effects is also to be achieved through reduction and/or elimination of the notable global quantities emanating from the agricultural sector.

The challenge thus consists in transforming agriculture such that it feeds a growing population against the backdrop of climate change without compromising the basis of natural resources. More productive and resilient agriculture requires better management of natural resources such as land, water, soil and genetic resources by means of practices such as conservation agriculture, integrated management, agro-forestry and sustainable regimes. Such “climate-smart agriculture” would make it possible to sustainably increase productivity and resilience (adaptation) and to reduce/eliminate greenhouse gases (mitigation), while promoting the achievement of national food security and development goals.

The 21st Conference of the Parties (COP21) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change that will hold in Paris from 30 November to 11 December 2015 is a crucial meeting to the extent that it must produce a new legally binding international agreement on climate. Consequently, incorporation in Central Africa of climate change concerns into agricultural policies requires that priority be accorded to capacity building for members of parliament, national experts and inter-governmental organizations (IGO). Based on their prerogatives in government action, participants could, should they have the required authority, reach decisions on the emergence and entrenchment of a culture of management of climate risks through agricultural policies. It is in this regard that the ECA Office for Central Africa will beg to organize a sub-regional workshop to build capacity on how to better mainstream climate change concerns into agricultural policies in Central Africa.

I. Objectives

The main objective of the seminar is to inform and sensitize experts from member states of Inter-governmental organizations (IGOs) as well as parliamentarians, about agricultural sector risks related to climate and its changes in Central Africa and build their capacity to surmount the threats brought about by climate changes and thereby guarantee food security, improve the means of subsistence of farmers and the management of natural resources.

More specifically, the concern shall be to: i) ensure a better understanding of climate changes and evaluate their effects on agriculture in Central Africa; ii) Identify adaptation and mitigation practices, technologies and policies for agricultural and food systems in Central Africa; and iii) support the inclusion of agriculture in climate change related policies as well as inclusion of climate concerns in agricultural policies at all levels.

II. Programme

The seminar programme shall comprise plenary presentations and break-out sessions.

1. Presentations

There will be a series of presentations spread through five working sessions on the following themes:

Session 1 : The state of climate in Central Africa

- State of knowledge on impacts, adaptation, mitigation of the effects of climate changes worldwide: the challenges of COP21;
- Climate change in Central Africa: Past – Present - Future
- Climate variations, desertification and heat in Central Africa

Session 2 : Impacts of climate changes on agriculture in Central Africa

Climate variations, desertification and heat in Central Africa

- Climate change and insights into water resources in Central Africa
- Impact of climate changes on agriculture in Central Africa
- Impact of agriculture and deforestation on greenhouse gas emissions in Central Africa

Session 3. Theoretical framework underlying the adaptation of agriculture to climate change

- Theoretical framework of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)
- The FAO theoretical framework on adaptation

Session 4. Review of climate change adaptation policies in the agricultural sector

- Impacts-vulnerability to climate change and adaptation options in Central Africa
- Irrigation as a means of limiting climate change effects;
- Seasonal projection or early warning mechanism as adaptation response to climate changes;
- Climate insurance for managing agricultural sector risks related to climate and its changes.

Session 5. Importance of climate changes in the agricultural initiatives developed in Central Africa

- Central African regional policy on agriculture and food security in the context of climate change ;
- National experiences in implementing adaptation and mitigation projects (NAPAs) in the agricultural sector.

2. Break-out sessions

The seminar programme shall also comprise break-out sessions whose objective will be to collect basic information to develop a sub-regional plan of action on mainstreaming climate changes into agricultural policies.

Two themes shall be discussed:

Theme 1: Appropriate adaptation and mitigation strategy in the agricultural sector in Central Africa

Today, it is admitted that for African countries without sufficient resources to develop climate change responses, sub-regional integration frameworks are the most appropriate avenues for engaging actions to combat the negative effects of climate changes. Discussion under the first theme will aim to identify the appropriate approaches through which member States and IGOs may contribute to mainstream climate change concerns into community agricultural policies in the ECCAS/CEMAC area.

Theme 2: Strengthening the institutional framework and building regional, national and local capacity to cope with climate changes in agricultural development in Central Africa.

Mainstreaming climate change into agricultural policies and efficient implementation of climate change adaptation methods in the various agro-ecological zones in Central Africa will undoubtedly require strengthening the institutional framework and the existing financial, human and technical capacities in Central Africa. The second theme will aim to propose strategies for operationalizing adaptation policies in the various agro-ecological zones in Central Africa (forests, fishing, rain-fed and irrigated agriculture, livestock breeding).

III. Expected results

The main expected results of the seminar are the following:

- Climate change-related risks in the agricultural sector in Central Africa are better understood by participants;
- The capacities of participants to determine and implement the most appropriate adaptation measures are strengthened;
- Agricultural policies in ECCAS member countries progressively mainstream climate risks.

IV. Participation

Participants in the seminar shall be central governments experts of Member States responsible for national agriculture development policies and strategies as well as representatives of CEMAC, ECCAS, COMIFAC and CEBEVIRHA (one representative per institution). Papers shall be presented by experts, notably from universities, the FAO and the African Centre for Meteorological Application to Sustainable Development (ACMAD).

V. Duration and venue of the seminar

It shall be a three-day seminar hosted in Douala-Cameroon, from 2 – 4 December 2015.

VI. Organization

The seminar is organized by the Sub-regional Office for Central Africa of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA/SRO-CA).

VII. Working Languages

The deliberations shall be conducted in French.

VIII. Contacts

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